

Immigrants and the socialization of the self

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Abstract

A distinction is often made between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. These cultures differ regarding parenting styles and socialization of the self. Recent years have seen ever-increasing immigration from non-Western countries to Western countries. Such immigration often involves a transition from collectivistic cultures to individualistic cultures. This results in a mismatch regarding parenting style, resulting in a specific type of parenting for immigrants. This article will discuss the consequences of immigrant parenting for the parental socialization of the self. It is proposed that immigrant parenting differs from parenting in the country of origin, as well as from parenting in the host culture. This results in the socialization of the autonomous-related self, a type of self characteristic of cultures in transition.

Keywords: immigrants, parenting, autonomous-related self, socialization of the self.

Introduction

A common distinction has been drawn between collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Kagitçibasi, 1996). According to Kagitçibasi, collectivistic cultures are characterized by authoritarian parenting and an emphasis on obedience. Individualistic cultures, however, are characterized by authoritative parenting, with an emphasis on stimulating the development of self-esteem and independence. Due to the different values of individualism and collectivism, it is likely that parenting and parental socialization goals differ between collectivism and individualism.

The different parenting styles result in different selves. For the purposes of this paper, the concept of “self” reflects the idea of a self-concept, which consists of the set of attributes, abilities and values that defines a person (Berk, 2009). The focus of this article is the self in relation to others. Related to the distinction between collectivistic and individualistic cultures is the distinction between the autonomous and related self (Kagitçibasi, 2005; Eaton & Louw, 2000). The autonomous self is characteristic of individualistic cultures, whereas the related self is characteristic of collectivistic cultures (Kagitçibasi, 2005). These selves are often seen as mutually exclusive. This causes problems when individualistic and collectivistic cultures come into contact.

It is predicted that, by 2015, 21.2% of the Dutch population will be of foreign origin (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2009). The percentage of immigrants in the larger cities will be approximately 50%. This raises questions regarding the socialization of the self. The majority of immigrants in the Netherlands are from

collectivistic cultures that dramatically differ from the dominant individualistic Dutch culture, a culture that the Netherlands shares with many other Western countries. If the autonomous self is emphasized by the individualistic cultures and the related self is emphasized by collectivistic cultures, which of these will assume the greatest importance in the socialization of immigrant parents?

This article will address the socialization of the self emphasized by immigrant parents. First, the distinction between the autonomous and related self will be discussed, with a focus on the differences of these types of self. Afterward, collectivistic and individualistic parenting styles will be compared and contrasted, in order to determine the characteristics of these parenting styles, specifically regarding the socialization of the self. Doing this will highlight the differences between individualism and collectivism and show the conflicts immigrant parents have to face. Further, the characteristics of immigrant parenting will be reviewed, and the consequences of immigrant parenting for the self will also be discussed. Finally, a nuance will be introduced regarding the dichotomy between individualism and collectivism.

Autonomous vs. related self

As noted above, the distinction between the autonomous and the related self is made alongside the distinction between individualism and collectivism. The autonomous self is linked to individualistic cultures, whereas the related self is more prevalent in collectivistic cultures (Kagitçibasi, 2005). These concepts of autonomy

and relatedness are often referred to as independence and interdependence respectively.

The autonomous and related self are often explained in terms of self-construal, which is an individual's sense of self in relation to others (Eaton & Louw, 2000; Santamaria, de la Mata, Hansen, & Ruiz, 2010). The distinction between independent and interdependent self-construal can be made. A person's independent self-construal is the individual's view of self as being an autonomous, bounded and unitary agent. The independent self does not depend on context. It is a stable self, which does not change under the influence of any particular context. Interdependent self-construal, however, is flexible and variable. This type of self-construal changes among different contexts and relationships.

Kagitçibasi (2005) offers a further explanation of the differences between independence and interdependence. With regard to autonomy (or independence), agency is of importance. Being autonomous means being an agent and not being coerced to act, and to act willingly. It is often characterized as "separateness."

Kagitçibasi (2005) claims that in interdependence (collectivism), a heteronomous-related self exists. This heteronomous-related self is characterized by a high degree of relatedness and a low degree of autonomy. Independence (individualism), however, emphasizes the autonomous-separate self. A low degree of relatedness and a high degree of autonomy are characteristic of the autonomous-separate self.

Collectivistic parenting

The expression of the types of self explained in the previous paragraph differ in individualistic and collectivistic countries. The important question is how these different selves are socialized by parents. How do the parenting strategies reflect parental socialization goals?

As noted above, parenting in collectivistic countries is characterized by an authoritarian parenting style with an emphasis on obedience (Kagitçibasi, 1996). The individual in these collectivistic cultures is seen as dependent on the various social roles one holds. This influences the parental socialization of the self.

With regard to parenting, parents from a collectivistic culture stress the importance of interdependence (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). This concept of interdependence can be divided into

three core-values: connection to the family and other close relationships, orientation to the larger group, and respect and obedience.

Connection to the family is seen in many different collectivistic cultures (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). Different collectivistic cultures exhibit different constructs regarding this connection to the family. For Latino families, "familism" is important, whereas Asian families and African-American families refer to connection to the family as "family obligation" and "extended kin" respectively. The self in collectivistic countries is seen as an extension of the family.

Collectivistic countries or communities emphasize the good of the larger community of which one is a member (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). This results in an orientation to the larger group. Individuals of collectivistic communities are therefore aware that their actions reflect upon the larger group. The repercussions of their actions are commonly considered before acting. This is reflected in a self that changes between contexts and relationships (Eaton & Louw, 2000).

Respect and obedience are widely recognized values of collectivism (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). The collectivistic emphasis on obedience stems from the old hierarchical structure, in which parents and elders make the decisions for children. Respect and obedience serve to achieve and maintain harmony within the group.

These collectivistic socialization goals result in specific parenting practices. Parenting practices relating to body-contact and body stimulation are often seen in the ethno-theories of parents with a collectivistic background (Keller et al., 2006). Along with responsiveness to negative signals, these parenting practices are related to the development of a related self.

Individualistic parenting

Parenting in individualistic societies is characterized by an authoritative parenting style that emphasizes the development of autonomy (Kagitçibasi, 1996). The self in these individualistic cultures is an autonomous, bounded and unitary agent.

As reflected in the concept of the self, parents of individualistic societies stress the importance of autonomy. This concept of autonomy can be divided into four key values: personal choice; intrinsic forms of motivation and persistence; self-esteem; and self-maximization (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007).

Making personal choices is important because it gives an individual the opportunity to assert his or her preferences (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). Furthermore, the concept of personal choices enables the establishment of a unique identity. Being internally driven to achieve the goals that have been set, referred to as intrinsic forms of motivation, is closely related to personal choices. Making personal choices facilitates intrinsic motivation. Raising children who are intrinsically motivated to learn is very important.

The importance of intrinsic motivation implies the importance of personal choice and motivation in parental socialization goals (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). Feeling good about oneself, or high self-esteem, is believed to be very valuable for successful outcomes. High self-esteem is important for the happiness and success of individuals. Parents believe they have to promote self-esteem in their children because it is essential to their healthy development. In individualistic cultures, there is a great deal of emphasis on reaching one's full potential (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). This self-maximalization is perhaps the most important aspect of individualism.

These specific socialization goals result in specific parenting practices as well. Ethno-theories of individualistic parents consist of parenting practices involving face-to-face contact and object play (Keller et al., 2006). Furthermore, there is an emphasis on reactivity to positive signals of the child, which results in the importance of praise. These individualistic socialization goals influence the development of an autonomous self.

Immigrant parenting

Significant differences concerning the conceptions of parenting exist between societies that reflect different cultural backgrounds (Keller et al., 2006; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). These differences are related to distinct self-concepts. Collectivism emphasizes connection to the family, orientation to the larger group and respect and obedience. In contrast, individualism emphasizes autonomy, intrinsic motivation, high self-esteem and self-maximalization.

An important question here has to do with how parenting is influenced by immigration. Immigrants usually come from countries that are less industrialized and less affluent than the countries they move to (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). This influences the cultural identity of these immigrants. Collectivistic oriented cultures usually

arise in these less affluent and less industrialized countries, whereas the receiving countries have a predominantly individualistic orientation (Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000). The preference for collectivistic parenting, however, remains characteristic for immigrants. Immigration thus results in a mismatch between the immigrant, collectivistic culture and the receiving, individualistic culture.

It is important to mention that, with regard to the orientation towards collectivism or individualism, educational level is of importance. A lower educational level and a lower SES result in greater orientation towards collectivistic culture (Durgel, Leyendecker, Yagmurlu, & Harwood, 2009). However, even when educational level and SES are controlled for, significant differences can be found between parents of different cultural backgrounds.

Immigrants may display different forms of adjustment to the dominant culture. The different forms of cultural transmission that can be experienced by an individual are referred to as acculturation (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002; as cited in Durgel et al., 2009). The forms of cultural transmission result from contact with persons and institutions belonging to cultures other than one's own. Four acculturation strategies can be distinguished: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization (Berry, 2001). The way in which a migrant relates to the dominant society is dependent on both cultural maintenance and adaptation dimensions. This results in a particular acculturation strategy.

These acculturation strategies influence the long-term socialization goals of immigrant mothers (Durgel et al., 2009). Turkish-Dutch people display integration with the Dutch culture in public domains but maintain their traditional Turkish values in private spheres, such as family relations (Arends-Toth, 2003). Durgel et al. (2009) have shown that acculturation to German culture was significantly and positively related to the goals of close warm relationships and personal and economic potential. This study also highlights the influence of acculturation strategies on long-term socialization goals. After controlling for education, there is a significant difference between integrated and separated mothers. Integration-oriented mothers show more individualistic long-term socialization goals. Yagmurlu and Sanson (2009) found similar results. Mothers in the integration group report lower levels of obedience-demanding behaviors. It

seems that more integration results in more distance from the Turkish child-rearing ideals.

However, the individualistic orientation displayed by immigrants is less than the individualistic orientation displayed by German mothers (Durgel et al., 2009). Educational level is important here. Involvement in German culture increased with the level of education, resulting in a more individualistic orientation. Furthermore, mothers who were second-generation immigrants and who had a higher level of education were also more likely to foster autonomy when compared to first generation mothers. This is consistent with the findings of Yaman, Mesman, van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg and Linting (2010). They found that, even in second-generation immigrant families, the mean levels of parenting behaviors may still be different from those in the host culture. However, the patterns of associations between parenting behaviors are comparable. Differences between second-generation immigrants and members of the dominant culture stem from aspects of parenting that are rather stable. Most of the second generation Turkish immigrant mothers in a study by Schoelmerich, Leyendecker and Citlack (2006) were either assimilated or integrated into German society, but still expected their children to maintain close relationships with families and relatives.

It can thus be concluded that immigrant parenting differs from parenting in the country of origin as well as from parenting in the host culture. Compared to parenting in the country of origin, immigrant parenting tends more toward individualistic goals and practices. However, compared to parenting in the host culture, immigrant parenting places greater emphasis on maintaining close relationships with families and relatives, something that is characteristic of collectivistic cultures. The consequences of these phenomena for the socialization of the self emphasized by immigrant parents will be discussed next.

Consequences of immigrant parenting for the self

The fact that immigrant parenting differs from classic individualistic or collectivistic parenting, will have consequences for the development and socialization of the self. A typical individualistic or autonomous self is in conflict with the importance of maintaining close relationships with family and relatives (Kagitçibasi, 1996). The typical

collectivistic or related self, however, is in conflict with the greater emphasis on autonomy that characterizes immigrant parenting.

Kagitçibasi (2005) proposes the autonomous-related self for societies in transition. There is a general assumption that there is a global shift from interdependence towards independence that occurs concomitantly with urbanization and economic development. With urban lifestyles and increasing affluence, the material interdependence between generations decreases. Psychological interdependence, however, remains important because it is a prominent feature in the culture of interdependence (collectivism) and is not in conflict with new lifestyles. Parents no longer perceive autonomy as a threat to future collective identity. Connectedness is desired because interdependence remains valuable. Control therefore remains an important feature of immigrant parenting, even though this parenting is no longer authoritarian, because control now serves as “order setting” instead of “dominating”.

This results in a third type of self, the autonomous-related self (Kagitçibasi, 2005; Santamaria et al., 2010), which is characterized by both high relatedness as well as high autonomy. This autonomous-related self develops within a family model of psychological interdependence, in which both (order-setting) control and autonomy are important. In this idea of the self, autonomy and relatedness are not seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as two coexisting dimensions. Autonomy here is perceived as agency with volition, and thus as not being connected to relatedness.

It can be concluded that, with a change in parenting, a change in the socialization of the self occurs as well. With the change towards more individualistic goals and practices, immigrant parents display a change towards the socialization of the autonomous-related self, a self that is the result of the emphasis immigrant parents place on the maintenance of close relationships.

Dichotomy

Even though this paper has largely discussed literature that assumes a dichotomy between individualism and collectivism (e.g. Kagitçibasi, 1996; Eaton & Louw, 2000; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007; Keller et al., 2006), it is important to introduce an important nuance. There is growing evidence against a strict dichotomy between individualism and collectivism. Killen and Wainryb (2000) propose that the existing dichotomy between

individualism and collectivism results in incorrect labeling of both cultures and individuals. Other values and ideologies that might be important for a specific culture or individual are ignored. Cultures and individuals are not exclusively individualistic or collectivistic. Each individual constitutes a mixture of individualistic and collectivist orientations.

However, even though individual differences exist, a distinction between “allocentric” and “idiocentric” individuals can be made (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). Allocentric individuals display a preference for collectivistic goals and ideals. Idiocentric individuals, on the other hand, tend more towards individualistic goals and ideals. It thus seems that, even though a strict dichotomy might be out of place, the distinction between the two types of cultures does appear to be valid.

Conclusion

This article explored how parenting is influenced by immigration and how immigrant parenting style influences the socialization of the self that parents emphasize.

Immigrants’ culture of origin is often a collectivistic culture, whereas the dominant culture in the host-country is often individualistic (Raeff et al., 2000). These different influences impact upon the parenting styles of immigrants. Collectivistic parenting is usually characterized by emphasis on obedience, and is reflected in an authoritarian parenting style (Kagitçibasi, 1996). Individualistic parenting, on the other hand, emphasizes the development of autonomy, which is typically reflected in an authoritative parenting style. However, it has been shown that immigrant parenting differs from parenting in both the country of origin as well as the receiving country (Durgel et al., 2009). Immigrant parenting reflects both individualistic and collectivistic values. There is a greater orientation towards individualistic values, such as the socialization of autonomy (Durgel et al., 2009; Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009), but maintaining close relationships with families and relatives, characteristic for collectivistic cultures, remains important as well (Yaman et al., 2010).

This dynamic results in the socialization of a new form of the self: the autonomous-related self (Kagitçibasi, 2005). This type of self is high in relatedness as well as in autonomy and thus combines the characteristics of both the autonomous and related self.

The socialization of the self in immigrants remains a troublesome area. Conflict often arises when collectivistic and individualistic cultures come into contact. Further research should focus upon the problems parents and children face regarding the socialization of the self. Guidance should be offered to immigrant parents who need to adapt their parental and socialization goals to the dominant culture. Research should always keep in mind that a strict dichotomy between collectivistic and individualistic cultures does not exist given that there are always differences at the individual level (Killen & Wainryb, 2000). A relative tendency towards individualism or collectivism within a culture can, however, be identified (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007).

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